



Low allergen plants and gardens

Spending time in the garden can boost wellbeing, reduce stress and promote relaxation. But for people with asthma or allergies, certain plants, trees and shrubs can worsen symptoms.

A low allergen approach to gardening can help reduce triggers while keeping your indoor and outdoor spaces attractive and comfortable.

Why can plants and gardens trigger symptoms?

Asthma, hay fever, eczema and dermatitis can be triggered by pollen from plants, lawns, weeds and trees. Pollen is released as part of a plant's reproduction cycle.

Breathing in pollen can cause:

- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Sneezing or runny nose
- Itchy or watery eyes
- Skin irritation

Plants release their pollen in two ways:

- Animal-pollinated plants - produce small amounts of pollen which are carried by birds or insects
- Wind-pollinated plants - produce large amounts of lightweight pollen that travel through the air

Other garden elements may also trigger symptoms:

- Compost, mulch or damp potting mix can release mould spores
- Insect bites or stings can trigger an allergic reaction

What is a low allergen garden?

A low allergen garden is designed to minimise exposure to triggers. While pollen from neighbouring gardens can still reach you, reducing allergens in your own space can make a big difference.

- Choose plants that produce little airborne pollen
- Use materials that limit mould
- Plan outdoor spaces to reduce direct contact with plants or soil that may trigger allergies



Peak pollen season in Western Australia

In Western Australia, peak pollen season generally occurs from September to February, during spring and summer.

However, pollen levels can vary depending on:

- Weather conditions
- Wind patterns
- Timing of plant flowering
- Rainfall

The *Perth Pollen Count and Resource*, a collaboration between Edith Cowan University and AirHealth, provides local pollen forecasts to help Western Australians to monitor risks and take preventive measures during danger periods.

Tips to reduce pollen and mould exposure

Plant selection

- Select bird or insect-pollinated plants rather than wind-pollinated species
- Choose low fragrance plants (strong fragrance can trigger symptoms in some people)

- When planting certain trees (e.g. Ginkgo) choose female trees which do not produce pollen
- Check local nurseries or botanic gardens for low allergen options suited to Western Australia
- See the guide on the following page for low allergen plant options

Rethink lawns

Lawns can trap pollen, which becomes airborne when mowing. You can:

- Replace lawn with paving, gravel or ground covers
- Choose low-pollen, slow-growing turf such as buffalo grass
- Mow regularly before grasses flower and form seed heads
- Lightly dampen grass before mowing to reduce airborne pollen

Manage weeds

Most weeds are wind pollinated and produce airborne pollen.

- Remove weeds promptly
- Use gravel or scoria mulch
- Plant dense ground covers to suppress weed growth

Be careful with mulch and compost

Organic mulch and compost can produce mould spores.

- Consider inorganic mulch such as gravel or scoria
- Avoid compost heaps near windows or living areas
- Moisten potting mix before use
- Wash hands after gardening

Water wisely

Fine spray irrigation systems can stir up pollen and mould.

- Use drip irrigation instead of spray sprinklers
- Be aware that during spring and early summer, thunderstorms or light rain can break pollen into very small particles that may worsen asthma



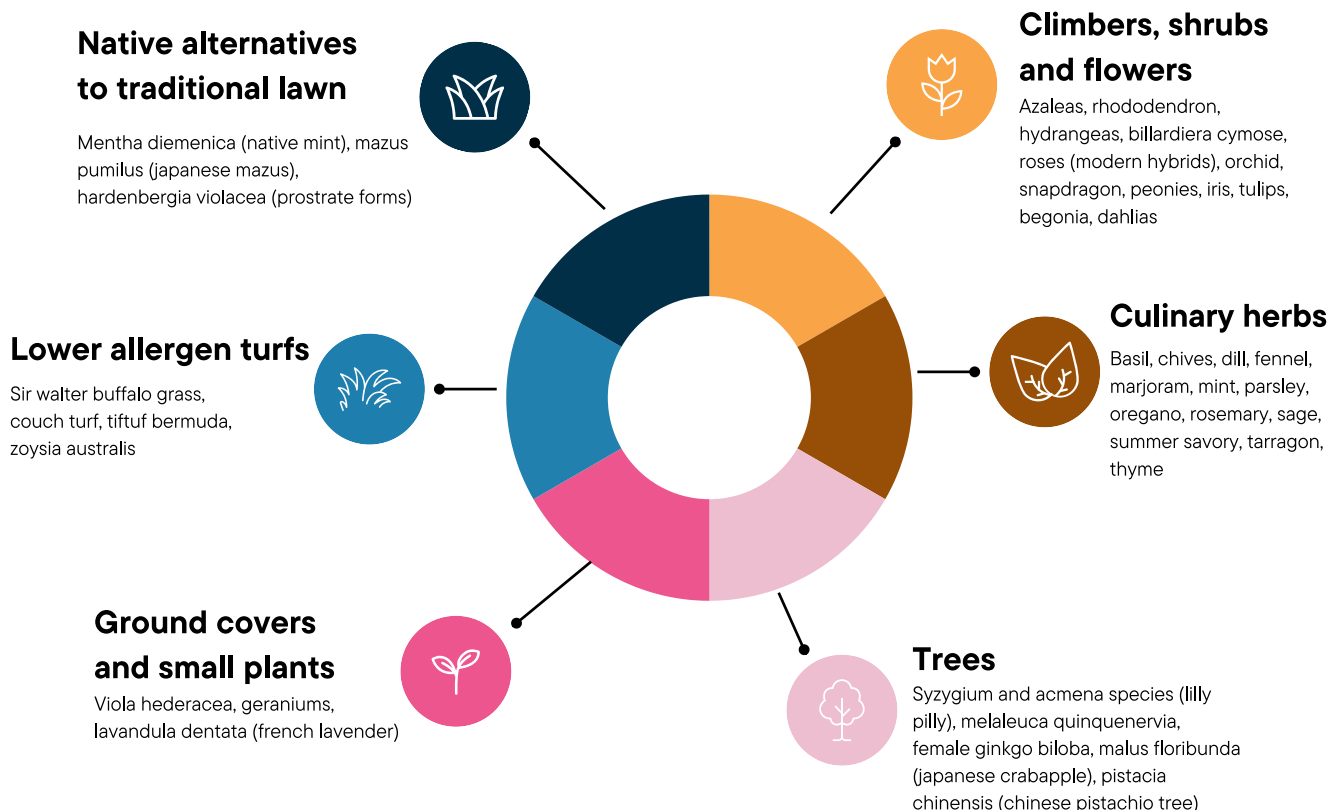
Gardening tips

- Garden on cool, still days
- Avoid gardening on high pollen or windy days
- Garden early in the morning when dew is present
- Avoid drying washing outside on high pollen days
- Wear gloves, eye protection and a mask
- Take your preventer medication daily as prescribed
- Removing flowering branches before they bloom
- Keep your reliever medication with you
- Change your clothes and shower after gardening

Lower allergen plant options

Lower allergen garden options have been included below. These plants are generally insect-pollinated or produce lower levels of airborne pollen. However, no plant is completely allergen free, and some may still cause irritation in sensitive individuals.

Check with your local nursery or botanic society for advice on the most suitable species for your area. You can also consult the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy's *Pollen Calendar* to better understand flowering times in your region.





Plants commonly associated with moderate to high allergen risk

- Ryegrass and many pasture grasses
- Cypress and pine trees
- Birch, alder, ash trees
- Elm, oak, maple trees
- London plane trees
- Olive and privet trees
- Liquidambar trees
- Canary palms
- Poplar and willow trees

Reducing exposure to these species can help minimise symptoms.

Important reminder

Low allergen gardens, plants and trees can reduce exposure but cannot eliminate pollen entirely.

Always follow your asthma or allergy management plan and seek medical advice if symptoms worsen.

Sources:

1. Ironwood Institute. *Dirt therapy: New research reveals 93% of Aussies have improved mental health from spending time in the garden.* 2025.
2. Perth Pollen Count and Forecast. 2025.
3. Very Well Health. *6 Outdoor Irritants That Can Trigger an Allergic Asthma Reaction.* 2025.
4. Asthma Australia. *Gardening and Asthma Triggers Guide.* 2025.
5. Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy. *Pollen calendar - guide to common allergenic pollen.* 2025.
6. Rosemount Turf. *Allergy-Friendly Lawns: A Rosemount Turf Guide.* 2025.
7. Lawn Solutions Australia. *What Is the Best Low Allergy Grass?* 2025.
8. Nursery Near Me. *Low Allergy Plants for Australian Gardens.* 2025.
9. Evergreen. *Top Trees for a Low-Allergen Garden.* 2025.
10. PerthNow. *Perth's worst areas for hayfever sufferers revealed as scientists identify which trees are biggest culprits.* 2025.

How we can help

Respiratory Care WA has a team of respiratory healthcare professionals here to provide information and support for Western Australians living with asthma and COPD. We offer in-person education and support at our respiratory hubs or via telehealth. Our team can also visit schools, workplaces or community groups to deliver free asthma management sessions.

Email ask@respiratorycarewa.org.au to find out more.